Environmental Assessment

Groom Road Emergency Temporary Housing Site

East Baton Rouge Parish, LA

FEMA-1603-DR-LA

September 2005

FEMA

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Baton Rouge Joint Field Office

Environmental Assessment
Emergency Temporary Housing
Hurricane Katrina
FEMA-1603-DR-LA

A. Project Name: Groom Road Emergency Temporary Housing Site

B. Purpose and Need:

Hurricane Katrina, a Category Four hurricane with a storm surge 25 feet above normal high-tide levels, moved across the Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama gulf coasts on August 29, 2005. First landfall occurred near southern Plaquemines Parish, south of Buras, Louisiana. Maximum sustained winds at landfall were estimated at 140 miles per hour. Hurricane Katrina made subsequent landfalls at Gulfport and Biloxi, Mississippi.

President Bush declared a major disaster for Louisiana due to damages from Hurricane Katrina, and signed a disaster declaration (FEMA-1603-DR-LA) on August 29, 2005, authorizing FEMA to provide federal assistance in designated areas of Louisiana. As of September 9, 2005, the affected area was over 90,000 acres in size, over 330,000 families had been displaced, and over $690 million in expedited aid had been given to the victims. Displaced individuals and families are currently living in shelters during temporary housing identification; therefore, there is a need to expedite the selection and development process where temporary housing will be built to minimize their time spent in the shelters.

FEMA proposes to administer federal disaster assistance funds per the Robert T. Stafford Disaster Relief and Emergency Assistance Act, 42 USC 5121-5206, as amended (Stafford Act). Stafford Act Section 408 authorizes FEMA's Individual Assistance Program to provide emergency temporary housing for disaster victims whose homes are uninhabitable. FEMA has identified the need to provide temporary housing for residents in East Baton Rouge Parish, where the proposed project is located.

C. Project Location:

The proposed site is located south of the Groom Road and Hovey Avenue intersection in Baker, East Baton Rouge Parish, Louisiana (Figures 1 and 2). The site is located about 10 miles north of Baton Rouge, and 91 miles northwest of New Orleans.

D. Site Description:

The site consists of approximately 62 acres of land owned by the Louisiana State Corrections Department. The site is bordered on the north by Groom Road, on the east by a church and private property, on the south by Baker Canal, and on the west by private property that is forested. The terrain is essentially flat and ground cover consists of approximately 90 percent non-native grasses and 10 percent tree cover (Figure 3). A ditch, approximately 12-feet deep and surrounded by trees, is located in the western one-third of the property and is not connected to Baker Canal or the ditch along Groom Road. A man-made agricultural pond is located near the middle of the site. The pond is approximately 80-feet by 90-feet and currently contains water. Overhead electrical lines border the site on the north.

E. Project Description:

This alternative would involve the construction of a travel trailer park (hereafter "the Park") which would accommodate approximately 600 travel trailers (Figure 4). At this time, Park occupancy is not expected to exceed 18 months.

All utilities would be installed, including connecting potable water and electricity from the existing infrastructure. A sanitary sewer system would be constructed for the Park, including buried piping and self-contained treatment plants. The treatment plants would have capacity for treating about 90,000 gallons per day (gpd) with discharge of treated water to the Baker Canal located along the southern boundary of the site. Two new access roads off Groom Road would be built for residents' ingress and egress. The site would be prepped by mowing the grass and then covering the area with geotechnical grade fabric. Rock would be laid over the top of the fabric to form the interior roadways and trailer pads. The existing treed areas within the site and along the perimeter would be left to maintain the visual aesthetics of the site. Surface water from storms would follow the natural drainageways of the site which drain to Baker Canal and a creek located within the site. A safety fence would also be installed and maintained around the Park perimeter. Shuttle bus services would be provided to transport the Park residents to and from grocery stores, places of work, and schools until the City's public transportation system can be expanded to the area.

When the temporary housing need has ended, FEMA expects that the trailers would be hauled from the site, to suitable locations elsewhere (to be determined on a case-by-case basis). The Park would then be seeded and restored to previous conditions and/or used by the landowner in a manner consistent with county zoning classification.

F. Site Selection Process:

NEPA requires investigation and evaluation of reasonable project alternatives as part of the project environmental review process. In order to expedite the site selection process,

FEMA's contractors review available aerial photos and maps, conduct site reconnaissance field surveys, and contact state and local officials to identify potential sites. Factors considered in choosing a site include: site topography, property owner willingness, past land use, if it was already planned for development, access to existing utilities, and engineering feasibility.

G. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences

In order to meet the proposed purpose and need of timely delivery of emergency temporary housing, FEMA conducted an expedited environmental review process to identify environmental issues that need addressing. The environmental review process included a field reconnaissance visit of the proposed project site, as well as background research, and expedited agency consultation. The field reconnaissance visit was conducted on September 12, 2005. Background research consisted of a review of wetlands maps, census statistics, FEMA floodplain maps, hazardous materials databases, archaeological and historic structures databases, threatened and endangered species information, soil surveys, and other available information. Expedited agency consultation consisted of establishing a programmatic agreement with the Louisiana State Historic Preservation Office and an expedited review process with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The following matrix summarizes the results of the environmental review process (Table 1). Potential environmental impacts that were found to be negligible are not evaluated further. Resource areas that have the potential for impacts of minor, moderate, or major intensity are further developed in the following Section H. Definitions of the impact intensity are described below:

Negligible: The resource area (e.g., geology) would not be affected, or changes would be either non-detectable or if detected, would have effects that would be slight and local. Impacts would be well below regulatory standards, as applicable.

Minor: Changes to the resource would be measurable, although the changes would be small and localized. Impacts would be within or below regulatory standards, as applicable. Mitigation measures would reduce any potential adverse effects.

Moderate: Changes to the resource would be measurable and have both localized and regional scale impacts. Impacts would be within or below regulatory standards, but historical conditions are being altered on a short-term basis. Mitigation measures would be necessary and the measures would reduce any potential adverse effects.

Major: Changes would be readily measurable and would have substantial consequences on a local and regional level. Impacts would exceed regulatory standards. Mitigation measures to offset the adverse effects would be required to reduce impacts, though long-term changes to the resource would be expected.

Table 1. Affected Environment and Environmental Consequences Matrix

Resource Area	Impact Intensity				Mitigation	Agency Coordination / Permits	Comments
	Negligible	Minor	Moderate	Major			
Geology and Soils	X				Implement construction BMPs, install silt fences/straw bales to reduce sedimentation.		
Hydrology and Floodplains (Executive Order 11988)	X						Flood Insurance Rate Maps were reviewed on FEMA's wetsite. The site is located outside the 100-year floodplain.
Wetlands (Executive Order 11990)	X				Silt fences and construction barriers would be put in place to protect riparian zone through center of site.		Riparian zone through center of site would be protected and avoided.
Water Quality		X			Implement construction BMPs, install silt fences/straw bales to reduce sedimentation. Contractor to implement requirements of LAPDES wastewater discharge permit.	LADEQ, LAPDES wastewater permit to be obtained by construction contractor.	See Section H.
Air Quality	X				Vehicle operation times would be kept to a minimum. Area soils would be covered and/or wetted during construction to minimize dust. Rock cover for roads and housing pads would be wetted and/or treated periodically to minimize dust particles.		Parish airshed is in attainment for criteria pollutants per the Clean Air Act.
Vegetation and Wildlife	X						Site is grazed pasture, with predominantly ruderal non-native species.
Threatened and Endangered Species (Endangered Species Act Section 7)	X					USFWS determination of no effect. (9/11/05).	
Cultural Resources (National Historic Preservation Act Section 106)	X					SHPO determination of no effect. (09/11/05).	
Socioeconomics	X						
Environmental Justice (Executive Order 12898)		X					See Section H.
Noise		X					See Section H.

Safety and Security	X				Fences would be placed around the perimeter of the site and around the existing on-site pond to prevent access to Baker Canal and the pond and to assist in provided site safety. Contractor to provide 24-hour security services.		
Hazardous Materials and Toxic Wastes	X						Hazardous materials database search queried per ASTM standards on September 11, 2005. No sites of concern were identified by the database search. No environmental conditions of concern observed during field reconnaissance.
Traffic and Transportation		X			Contractor will coordinate with Parish traffic engineer to ensure traffic infrastructure can service the increased traffic volume.	Acting Chief Traffic Engineer was contacted on 09/12/05.	See Section H.

H. Additional Impact Analysis

Water Quality

As stated above, the site treatment plants would discharge treated wastewater to Baker Canal. According to the construction contractor, the canal has adequate capacity to convey the additional treated sanitary wastewater. The Baker Canal currently conveys the treated wastewater from the Jettson Correctional Facility located southwest of the project site. The contractor would be required to obtain a Louisiana wastewater quality permit (LAPDES) or waiver from the Louisiana Department of Environmental Quality to discharge to the canal prior to the site being occupied.

Environmental Justice

The demographics of the surrounding area are comprised of up to 63 percent minority populations and up to 23 percent low income populations. Construction activities and Park-related traffic would result in a short-term increase in traffic volume during the expected 15 day construction period. Construction related impacts would be short-term and would cease once the Park has been completed. A public notice was distributed to residents within 2 mile of the project site notifying them of the proposed project activities and the opportunity to comment.

Noise

Noise levels within the project area would increase during construction of the project due to construction equipment. Construction noise impacts would be short-term and limited to the duration of construction activities (about 15 days). Due to the urgency of the situation, construction would occur on a 24-hour schedule until the Park is completed. If necessary, noise reduction measures would be instituted. These measures could include: restricting the 24-hour construction schedule to the five days of construction, using a 7 A.M. to 7 P.M. construction schedule, completing construction closest to adjoining resident first, and/or completing noisier activities during the day if using a 24-hour schedule.

Traffic and Transportation

Currently, Groom Road is a paved two-lane roadway without paved shoulders. No traffic lights are located on any of the roadways within the project area. Traffic within the general project area would increase due to the ingress and egress of construction equipment. This traffic impact would be short-term and limited to the duration of construction. Traffic volumes would also increase due to the Park residents. These traffic impacts would short-term and limited to the duration of the need for temporary housing at the site. Due to the increased traffic volume, the contractor would need to work with the City Traffic Engineer to assure that the local level of service on the roadway remains adequate.

I. Public Involvement

A Public Notice was published in the Baton Rouge Advocate on September 14, 2005. Additionally, the public notice was distributed to residents within a 2-mile radius of the proposed site notifying them of the proposed project. The public notice was also placed in grocery stores and other public facilities in the project area.

Due to the emergency nature of this action, the public comment period will be brief – September 15 to September 17, 2005. Written comments on the Draft EA can be faxed to FEMA's Joint Field Office in Baton Rouge at (225) 346-5848; and verbal comments will be accepted at (225) 376-5260 and TTY for hearing or speech-impaired at 800-462-7585; between 8:00 A.M. and 5:00 P.M. The Draft EA can be viewed and downloaded from FEMA's website at http://www.fema.gov/ehp/docs.shtm and is also available for public review at the East Baton Rouge Library, 3501 Groom Road, Baker, Louisiana 70714. The library hours are Monday through Thursday from 9:00 AM to 8:00 PM; and Friday through Saturday from 9:00 AM to 6 PM; and Sunday from 2:00 PM to 6:00 PM. If no substantive comments are received, the Draft EA will become final and this initial Public Notice will also serve as the final Public Notice.

J. Figures

Attachment 1. Hazardous Materials Database Search

Attachment 2. Finding of No Significant Impact